

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-9

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
3 June 1980

Cuban flotilla ending as total nears 100,000

CIA warned of refugee flood, but
State Dept. too slow, critics say

By John Yemma

Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

Under Fidel Castro's orders, the "freedom flotilla" is ending.

As the last boats arrive from the Cuban port of Mariel and the refugee total climbs to 100,000, the focus of the crisis is shifting to well within US borders — to unrest at the Ft. Chaffee, Ark., processing center, and to how Washington can prevent a recurrence of the chaotic exodus from Cuba.

Fifty to 60 boats were en route to Key West June 2 with the last refugees, including a large Panamanian-registered ship capable of holding 2,000 persons. All other US craft have been ordered from Cuban waters by President Castro.

Critics are now accusing the Carter administration of failing to heed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) forecasts of the coming flood, not acting promptly through diplomatic channels to ensure an orderly procedure, and thereby failing to screen out agitators within the refugee groups.

A House intelligence subcommittee, in a study entitled "The Cuban Emigrés: Was There a US Intelligence Failure?" credits the CIA with warning the State Department five times between late January and March that the Castro government might begin a purge of dissidents by allowing a mass emigration.

The CIA reports did not predict the precise date but, according to Rep. Les Aspin (D) of Wisconsin, did indicate that the number of people involved could exceed 100,000. With these early signs, US diplomats should have opened negotiations with President Castro to establish an orderly evacuation procedure, Mr. Aspin and other critics said June 2.

The Cuban government was angered because of US sluggishness in processing the backlog of political prisoners awaiting exit, the congressman said, and also because US authorities were not discouraging the hijacking of Cuban boats to Florida.

"The bad news is that the US government never took advantage of its lead time, conducted a relatively weak, defensive diplomatic strategy, and failed to organize for the human flood it should have known was coming," the congressman said June 2 in a speech on the floor of the House.

Refugee affairs specialist Jerry M. Tinker of the Senate Judiciary Committee told the Monitor that even without the CIA warnings

there were many signs that pressure was building within Cuba. When Mr. Castro ended the large-scale departures from his country that had taken place between 1965 and 1973, more than 135,000 Cubans were left on American waiting lists.

"Some of those came here in the next six years, but if you add to that the number of political prisoners (recently put at 3,000 by Mr. Castro, but thought to number as many as 50,000 by other authorities), you can see that he was sitting on a Mt. St. Helens," Mr. Tinker said.

The net result of not using the Cuban intelligence, said Mr. Aspin, was that a potential foreign-policy bonanza was lost in the disorderly shuffle. This occurred, he said, because the administration:

- Switched from a closed-door to open-door, then back to a closed-door policy, alternatively trying to "bluff the Cuban-American community into foregoing the effort to rescue their relations and the Cuban government into thinking that we were prepared to go the limit."

- Did not listen to the complaints of the Cuban government about delays in routine processing and boat hijackings.

- Failed to develop a publicity campaign. "Given what has happened, the United States should be looking a lot better and the Cubans a lot worse," the congressman said.

- Was unable to mobilize other countries, especially those in Latin America, to accept refugees. "Castro, at will, has broken our effort to make this an international issue and has converted it, to his benefit, into something between him and us."

- Was inadequately prepared for the arrival of thousands of refugees. With better processing, he said, it might have been possible to detect the "undesirables" who are "blackening the reputation of those new arrivals."

While it is no justification for the unrest at Ft. Chaffee, Mr. Tinker said, similar problems occurred in Guam as Vietnamese refugees awaited a future uncertain to them.